

There have been several inspiring trip reports to the Taï Forest National Park in Ivory Coast published over the last few years, notably by Jon Hall, Martin Royle and especially the excellent one from Ben Schweinhart. Such forest hosts an impressive list of unique and endemic mammals of Western Africa that is very difficult to see elsewhere from what I understood from other trip reports or documentation. Therefore, my wife and I (well principally myself to be honest 😊) decided to pay a visit to this African region. Unfortunately, due to other trips planned for 2026 and our job constraints, we didn't have many days we could spend in Ivory Coast and we chose one week (6 days / 7 nights) between Christmas and New Year's Day for this visit.

We organized and booked directly this trip with Karl Diakite, the Managing Director of the Living The Wild Company ([www.facebook.com/Livingthewild/](https://www.facebook.com/Livingthewild/)) and the management team of Taï Forest lodges (<https://taiforestlodges.ci>). Karl never answered me directly but the Taï Forest Lodge reservation team was quite responsive and communication through emails and WhatsApp pretty straightforward. They took care of everything for this trip: accommodation, guiding and transfer from and to Abidjan. As said in previous reports, they are not very cheap but given all the logistic needed for the Touraco Ecotel located at the edge of the forest and especially for Camp Chimpanzé deeper inside the forest, the price level made total sense for me.

Getting to Ivory Coast / Abidjan from France is very easy with many flight options including Air France. The return flights we booked were all on time and uneventful. Given the flight schedules, we had to spend a night in Abidjan upon arrival and the end of the trip so we booked Hotel Blawa ([www.facebook.com/hotelblawaabidjan/?locale=fr\\_FR](https://www.facebook.com/hotelblawaabidjan/?locale=fr_FR)), a nice guesthouse recommended in other reports and conveniently located near the airport with transfer that can be easily organized. On top of that, the owner is a super friendly and helpful guy.

After reading several trip reports and given the limited time we had in Ivory Coast and wanted to maximize our time/days in the Forest, we decided to do the Abidjan - Taï Forest transfer by car rather than taking a domestic flight with possible delays and schedule leading to extra nights in San Pedro. As explained by Jon in his report, this is definitely doable within a day and a good option to save time although the driving time is quite long and somewhat tiring. The tared road between Abidjan and a bit after San Pedro is in very good shape, then it gets worse but with tracks in fairly good conditions until Grabo village and then it gets terrible from Grabo up to Djouroutou village and the Ecotel 😊. With a comfortable car and good driver (which we had on the way to the Forest), it took us 5 hours to drive from Abidjan to San Pedro and another 5h from San Pedro to the lodge (2h though to drive the last 65 km !!). On return, we had a crappy car and flat tire arriving in Abidjan but the drive was not that much longer, only 1h more. The transfer cost asked by the Tai Forest Lodge was expensive but again, given the distance (550km) and the fact that the driver must spend a night at the Ecotel and go back to Abidjan, I found this was reasonable.

The accommodation run by Tai Forest Lodge is basic but comfortable. The Ecotel is nicely done and well located on the edge of the forest. They have a nice open dining area with a deck overlooking the magnificent primary forest. The ten bungalows have ensuite toilets and shower with running water normally but the system was broken during our stay so we had to use cold water buckets, old camping style but fine. The Ecotel looked a bit on a declining state with many broken areas but they tried to make some repair during our stay though. I have no idea on the other hand when the running water will be operational again. There is some sporadic phone and internet connection at the Ecotel. Camp Chimpanzé is also rustic but I was pleasantly surprised as the tents were very comfortable, the location deep inside the forest really unique, and the dining area had a large roof allowing some shades during the day where we could relax and rest between activities looking at the forest with birds and even monkeys showing up sometimes. They even have toilets and showers with supposedly running water in this camp, which I found amazing given the location, but here also, a recent flood broke the water pump and we had to use water buckets instead 😊. The food served at both the Ecotel and Camp was very good!! What a good job I found for the camp and I can't imagine how many porters and how often they are bringing food and other supplies to the camp. The team running the Ecotel and Camp were all very friendly, smiling and doing their best to please us. I must say that during our week-long stay, we were basically the only guests, so they really took care and pampered us. We only saw another couple one night at the Ecotel and up to 5 persons at the Camp once who just came for one night for the chimp tracking experience. Having 7 nights and 6 days to visit the Forest, we basically split half/half the time spent in the Camp area and at the Ecotel + Hana River.

In terms of weather, December is supposed to be part of the dry season but during our week there, we actually had quite some rain, almost every day, but never for very long period though, so this did not really prevent us to do any boat cruise on the Hana River nor guided walks. As expected and because of the rain, it was not that hot with temperatures below 30°C but it was super humid. Since I don't support well humidity, I was constantly sweating a lot as soon as I was walking more than 10 meters! The boat cruises were much more pleasant for me 😊. On the other hand, my wife supported much better the humidity and even felt cold when cruising on the river!

When I booked this trip and taking into account recommendations from past visitors, I specifically asked to have Kevin Hino as our private guide and luckily we had him for the entire week at our full service. I'm so glad we had him! Kevin is really an excellent guide, knowing the forest and local wildlife very well and he is an excellent spotter. I cannot believe we would have seen as much as what we saw without him. In addition, what a pleasure to have for once a French speaking guide 😊 and we could exchange a lot about the forest national park management, the local wildlife and stories about the chimps groups. He was also always very keen to spend long time with us on the boat, or during both day and night walks to try to find as much wildlife as possible. A big thanks to Kevin again!

A few words about the Forest: Taï National Park is huge covering an area of 3,300 km<sup>2</sup> but is one of the last areas of remaining primary rainforest in West Africa. It was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1982 due to the diversity of its flora and unique fauna. Indeed, some mammal species of the Taï National Park are on the Red List of Threatened Species like pygmy hippos, olive colobus monkeys, chimpanzees or Jentink's duiker. The section we are visiting with Taï Forest Lodge is only a tiny portion in the Southwestern part of the forest. I found this forest truly magnificent with impressive tall trees, thick and pristine vegetation and a terrain that was not too tough to walk through: mostly flat with some decently steep slopes. The mix of river, water streams, tall trees, thick foliage and even granite inselbergs like Mont Niénokoué not far from the Camp offered some nice nature photo opportunities. I really liked this place and I found the forest to be in good state with park rangers and local guides trying their best to preserve such a rich ecosystem. However, the conservation status of protected areas in such countries is never guaranteed long term. Logging and deforestation seem to be on pause there but doesn't make us forget what happened before around the park with hundreds of kilometers of palm oil, rubber or cocoa tree plantations that we drove through till the very edge of the Taï forest. There are also mining operations outside of the park running full speed and pouring out dirt in the rivers roaming through the park. The Hana River is for example polluted according to Kevin and has a strange yellowish color. Apparently, the Ministry of Environment is somewhat helpless since the mines have official permits from the central government. When I asked Kevin, he told us that so far it looks like there is no visible impact of such pollution on the local wildlife but who knows how sustainable this is. On a more positive note, Kevin told us that poaching seems to decrease, at least in that part of the forest we visited, thanks to the active presence of rangers and he didn't hear for example any gun shots over the last few months.

Now let's talk about the wildlife as we came here for this 😊 As said earlier, this forest hosts a rich and unique wildlife with many different species of primates or duikers, several of them being endemic or near endemic (Diana monkey, zebra or Jentink's duikers, Liberian mongoose, pygmy hippo...). Some large iconic mammals like forest elephants, buffalos, leopards, pygmy hippos or even bongos to name a few are also present in the Taï Forest (we saw elephant and buffalo tracks during our stay but did not see any). Also, I understand this park has the largest remaining population of pygmy hippos in Africa with about 3000 individuals. In addition to mammals, there is a rich diversity of birds, reptiles, frogs or insects. Therefore, expectations were high during this trip and especially when reading what previous visitors could see during their trips. Of course, spending only a week in the forest implied that we might not see as much as others and guess what? this is what happened.... However, not only our time in Taï was short but apparently, that week was not a very productive one in terms of sightings and Kevin admitted it. Indeed, we spent long day and night sessions without seeing many wildlife, both mammals and birds, which was quite surprising and unusual according to Kevin. With such a large and pristine primary forest, I was expecting to hear a lot of bird sounds like what we experienced in Ghana but it was surprisingly quiet during our entire stay. Globally speaking we did not see a lot of wildlife, which was a bit disappointing, but on the other hand, we saw a decent variety of species, including all our main targets, so this was very positive! One last note about Taï Forest given the observation conditions in such a dense forest with animals often high in the canopy and most of them being very shy, especially monkeys, probably as a result of many years of poaching, I must say that this place is nice for naturalists and pure mammal or bird watchers but very challenging for photographers. Given our experience in Taï, I must congratulate Ben and Jon for the quality of the photos posted in their report. To be fair, we also had some nice photo opportunities but very few, and for several mammal species we just could not take any decent pictures because of sightings too brief, dense foliage or light conditions.

In order to discover the local wildlife, several options are possible and proposed by the Taï Forest lodge. One option is by boat along the Hana River situated right next to the Ecotel and that we take to go to Camp Chimpanzé. Kevin seemed to particularly like driving their small motorboat and we did several cruises both night and day. The water level was pretty high so the navigation was pleasant and I found very nice to discover such a beautiful forest by boat. That week, we actually saw more wildlife and mammal species by this means in comparison to the long walks done in the Camp area. Funny story (or maybe not so much actually 😊 ...): on the first day when we arrived at the lodge, Kevin proposed us to do an evening/night boat tour, which we of course gladly accepted. After a few miles navigating towards the Camp and already observing some interesting night birds and mammals, a big tree trunk was blocking the river and the boat could not pass through. Kevin told us that he would have to go to the village to find people to cut the tree

and clear the passage so that we could use the boat to reach the Camp later in the week instead of taking the 8km long trail from the Ecotel. When they did that on the following morning, I did not get what happened exactly but the cut tree fell on the boat and sank the engine in the river! As a result, he had to find other people at the village to help him diving in the river to recover the engine, dry it and repair it. This is Africa! All this made us “lost” almost a full day stuck at the Ecotel where we could only do short walks around the lodge without the guide. With the engine repaired, we could see along the Hana River: **King colobus, Western red colobus, Lesser spot-nosed monkeys, galagos, red-legged sun squirrels, forest giant squirrels**, one distant **West African Potto**, one **Pel's anomalure** (full black morph there) and one **African palm civet**! The river was also the place where we could easily see many critically endangered West African slender-snouted crocodile and several cool bird species.

The second way to observe wildlife was of course along the forest tracks during day and night walking sessions. According to Kevin, there is 236km of tracks around Camp chimpanzee, some are well maintained, and others could be quite tough to walk through but there is definitely enough ground to cover for many days to discover the forest and its wildlife. The walking sessions were actually quite disappointing that week as we did not observe much, either mammals or birds, during the long hours we spent with Kevin. One night for example during an extended session between 7pm to 2am, we only saw one **Maxwell duiker** and a couple of **Demidoff's galagos**, nothing else...! Quite frustrating and even Kevin felt discouraged at some point 😊. Interestingly, we actually saw many mammals on the trails near the Ecotel and even around the entrance gate at the edge of the forest. Kevin told us that it is not uncommon as monkeys often stay at the edge of the forest waiting for the right moments to visit the human plantations. Anyway, we could see by walk several primate species: **Demidoff's galago, West African potto, Lesser spot-nosed monkeys, Campbell's Monkeys**, one of our key targets: the beautiful **Diana monkeys** which were quite common around camp Chimpanzé, like **King Colobus**. One day, we saw a group of **Sooty mangabeys** that we tried to follow with some difficulties on the forest ground and we never managed to take any photos. At night we saw one **Beecroft's anomalure, several rodent species** including the cute **Nagtglass's Dormouse, Pohle's fruit bat**, one probable female **hammer-headed bat** and several **Maxwell's Duikers**.

Worth specially mentioning is the habituated **Western chimpanzees** tracking activity that is proposed every morning. We did that one morning and what a great experience to follow and watch such unique apes just by ourselves: the two of us and Kevin. We could follow a group for about 90 minutes observing many interesting interactions between the group members. A great experience for sure! On top of that, this is when we left the camp around 5am to go where the chimpanzees slept for the night that we came across a **tree pangolin** right next to the trail 😊!! What an amazing and lucky sighting: the pangolin was literally a couple of meters away from the trail searching for food in the thick foliage and we could observe it superbly well for a few minutes before he climbed up in the trees. What a memorable day!

The last option to observe wildlife and especially for pygmy hippo are hides or stakeouts along the river waiting for them hoping they would show up swimming in the river or grazing along the riverbanks. Due to multiple reasons (engine failure, rain, etc...) we could do this only once on the last night at a place where the Taï Forest Lodge team cleared kind of a hide overlooking a large sandy area on the Hana River. We brought food and comfortable chairs to sit down and wait there for most of the night with the hope to see a pygmy hippo (previous people saw hippo at this same place). For the story, something happened that week that created some frustration on our side to say the least 😊. Two days before this hide session, when we came back to the camp for lunch and rest after our morning walk, Kevin informed us he would need to bring back to the Ecotel by boat some guests who came for the chimp tracking activity. We stayed at the camp since we did the boat tour a few times already. When he came back all wet because rain poured like hell for a couple of hours that day, he told us excited and smiling: “look, I have a surprise!”, and he showed us a video taken with his cell phone while navigating with the guests on the Hana River of a pygmy hippo running out of the river in front of the boat in full daylight (<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/1Coh1priU2/>)! Unbelievable and we were at the camp and not on the boat!! Kevin said such type of sighting is very rare and only occurs a few times per year. So, coming back to the hide and with this video engraved in our memories, we got prepared for a long session waiting for a hippo to show up. With only one session and given the size of the forest versus the scanning area, we knew the chances to see a hippo were very slim. However, only after about an hour after it got dark, we heard some noise, not in the river nor in the vegetation near the riverbank in front of us but...just behind us! Kevin said nonchalantly this must be a hippo! All excited but taking care to stay as silent as possible, we scanned with our thermal cameras and bingo, a **pygmy hippo** was indeed roaming in the thick forest a few meters from us. I took a couple of snapshots with the thermal camera, and we were then wondering if we would light our torches for better photos. Kevin was afraid we would scare the hippo and since it was just the beginning of the night, he was hoping the hippo would move out of the forest to swim in the river and hopefully walk on the open riverbank for grazing where we could try nice photos. Therefore, we decided to stay in the dark and wait. We heard the hippo walking back and forth behind us but at some point, he suddenly got scared for unknown reasons and ran away deeper in the forest. We never saw him again. Damned! Well, this was not the observation I was dreaming of but given the circumstances, I think we were lucky

enough to see a **pygmy hippo**, which Kevin admitted and told us it was actually easier to see a pangolin than a hippo in the Taï Forest. We waited until 2am but saw nothing else so we went back to the Ecotel to get some sleep since it was the last night and we had the long drive back to Abidjan.

Conclusions from this trip: I realize we only spent one week in the Taï Forest, which naturally limits the number of observations, but I think the observation conditions were not the best during that week given Kevin's experience and what I read in past reports. As a consequence, we did not see many mammals and "only" 23 different species BUT we were lucky we could see all of our key targets: **chimpanzees**, one **tree pangolin**, several **Diana monkeys** and of course a **pygmy hippo** 😊!! The Taï Forest is really a beautiful and impressive forest; there is definitely wildlife inside but you need to work hard sometimes to see it. This wildlife is so special, with lots of endemism, that I really hope for the best for the future and preservation of such a unique ecosystem. There is still some hope I guess but clearly remaining challenges to make this place safe for animals. I also want to praise the Taï Forest Lodge team for their kindness, the excellent work and service they propose and thank again Kevin Hino, a wonderful guide and nice person. Given what we saw and the experience we had, I'm happy to have done such a trip but I'm not sure I would go back there again... and there are so many other places we would like to visit on earth!

Below is the list of all the mammals we could observe during our week spent in Taï forest:

Mammals with photos or well seen (lifers in green)				
Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen	Pic
Demidoff's galago	Galago de Demidoff	Galagoides demidovii	Commonly observed during night walks	X
West African potto	Potto de Bosman	Perodicticus potto	5 individuals observed throughout the week	X
Lesser spot-nosed monkey	Hocheur blanc-nez	Cercopithecus petaurista	A few observed near the Ecotelodge during the day and even at night along the Hana river	
Campbell's Monkey	Mone de Campbell	Cercopithecus campbelli	Only observed once with a group of Diana monkey	
Diana monkey	Cercopithèque diane	Cercopithecus diana	The most common and easiest monkey we observed in the forest	X
King Colobus	Colobe à camail	Colobus polykomos	Quite common during the day	X
Western red colobus	Colobe bai de l'Ouest	Procolobus badius	One group observed along the Hana river	X
Sooty mangabey	Mangabey fuligineux	Cercocebus atys	Groups observed twice and one we tried to follow by foot while on the ground	
Western chimpanzee	Chimpanzé de l'Ouest	Pan troglodytes verus	One habituated group followed and observed very nicely for about an hour	X
Pel's anomalure	Anomalure de Pel	Anomalurus pelii	1 individual seen at night along the Hana river. Full black morph in this forest	X
Beecroft's Anomalure	Anomalure de Beecroft	Anomalurus beecrofti	1 individual seen near camp chimpanzee at night	X
Red-legged sun squirrel	Héliosciure à pattes rousses	Heliosciurus rufobrachium	2 individuals seen: one along Hana river and another one near Ecotelodge	X
Forest Giant Squirrel	Grand écureuil de Stanger	Protoxerus stangeri	1 individual observed along the Hana river	X
Mouse (unknown species)	Souris (espèce inconnue)	Muridae...	1 observed near camp chimpanzee. Had a grey fur and no long tail so must be different to defua rat.	X
Common Defua Rat	Souris defua	Dephomys defua	Likely this species (with long tail & rufous color) observed a couple of times at night.	X
Edward's Swamp Rat	Rat des marais d'Edward	Malacomys edwardsi	Likely this species observed once during a night session near Ecotelodge	X
Nagtglas's Dormouse	Loir de Nagtglas	Graphiurus nagtglassi	1 cute little guy observed during our night walk near the lodge	X
Pohle's fruit bat	Chauve-souris frugivore de Pohle	Casinycteris ophiodon	2 observed during a night walk: one perched, another one flying and who actually lost a fruit in front of us!	X
Hammer-headed Bat	Hypsignathe monstrueux	Hypsignathus monstrosus	One looking to be a female observed perching high in a tree near Ecotelodge	X
Tree pangolin	Pangolin à petites écailles	Phataginus tricuspis	1 superb observation near camp chimpanzee	X
African palm civet	Civetie palmiste africaine	Nandinia binotata	1 individual seen at night along the Hana River	X
Maxwell's Duiker	Céphalophe de Maxwell	Philantomba maxwellii	1 or 2 observed during each night walk near camp chimpanzee	X

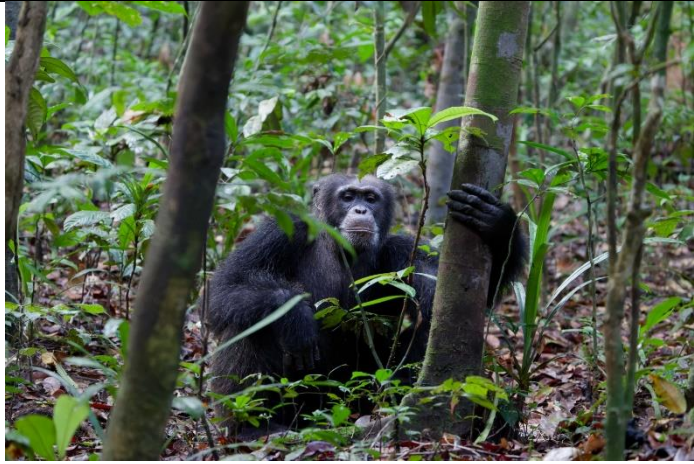


Pygmy Hippo	Hippopotame pygmée	Choeropsis liberiensis	Observed once during a hide session at the Hana river but seen on the thick forest side. Observation through thermal scope only.	X
<b>Total Species Recorded = 23</b>				
Below some other species that I don't count given the observation circumstances				
Thomas' galago	Galaho de Thomas	Galagoides thomasi	1 or 2 heard only with a different sound than Demidoff's but never observed	
Western tree hyrax	Daman des arbres de l'Ouest	Dendrohyrax dorsalis	Several heard only during our spotlight sessions in the forest	
Bay Duiker	Céphalophe à bande dorsale	Cephalophus dorsalis	One observation near the camp at night Kevin said should be this species. I only saw a shape moving deep inside the thick forest	
Water Chevrotain	Chevrotain aquatique	Hyemoschus aquaticus	Kevin spotted two on the Hana riverbank from the boat but I could only see shapes running away	
Bats	Chauves-souris		We saw many flying bats while walking at night but with no possibility to confirm identification	

I'm adding to this report pictures of some of the species we observed during that trip, especially those new to me.







Western chimpanzee



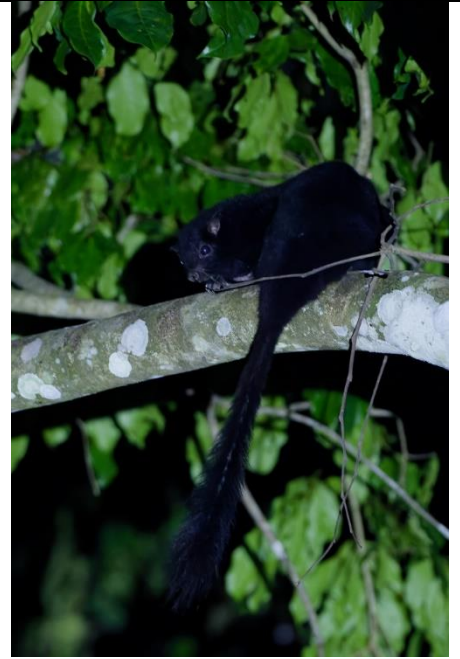
Beecroft's Anomalure



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African palm civet



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Pygmy hippo !!



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Tree pangolin !!